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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the International Federation of University Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

1. The International Federation of University Women is a worldwide organization of women graduates committed to empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace. The Federation and its members in more than 90 countries advocate and promote women's rights as human rights. In fulfilling this mission, the members endeavour to help Governments and civil society to fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

2. On the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we congratulate the Commission on the Status of Women on its decision to review progress and to work through remaining obstacles and new challenges. The Beijing Platform for Action is the most comprehensive blueprint for women's human rights, empowerment and gender equality.

3. The Federation believes that universal access to education for women and girls at all levels is a prerequisite for the empowerment of women. Our four priorities reflect this; we work to:

- Promote education for the girl child
- Promote adult literacy for women
- Promote access to and advancement of women in higher education
- Empower women to be leaders and decision makers

Education of the girl child

4. While most developing countries appear on track to reach the goal of gender equality at the primary level by 2015, efforts are needed to maintain and build on these gains. Many Governments have implemented laws concerning provision of free education, but problems remain. Among these are poverty, lack of basic amenities in schools and parental unwillingness to see value in the education of girls. With the effects of the current international economic crisis reaching down to the grass-roots level, some parents are finding it increasingly difficult to educate their daughters and are keeping them at home. "Re-traditionalization" in some societies is also keeping girls away from school. National and local Governments must work in close partnership with civil society to ensure progress. Diverse voices must be heard for planning and institutionalizing of gender equality in education.

Advancement of women in higher education

5. With growing attention being given to the role higher education has to play in sustainable development, the Federation believes it is important that States and institutions of higher education implement policies and structures that ensure women's access and success in higher education at all levels and in all aspects. While women are usually well represented in universities as a whole, there is a dearth of women in senior positions, particularly in academic posts. It is vital that women are included in decisions about the process, the curriculum, the organization and the system of higher education institutions.

Women and economic empowerment

6. The impact of the current world economic crisis on women's employment, in both the formal and informal sectors, as well as their invisible unpaid work highlights the need for women's economic empowerment and advancement in the world of work. For women to be leaders and decision makers requires continuing programmes and adequate resources directed at developing women's capacities and potential. Implementation of real equality includes equal opportunity, choice, treatment and resources. Gender equality must be regarded as a basic concept tool for the coordination of production and reproduction, which requires a transformation of the rules about what women's work is and what men's work is.

Gender-disaggregated statistics

7. The Federation strongly urges that greater attention be given to the collection of gender-disaggregated data for evaluating the contributions and situation of women, and consequently for devising appropriate national development policies. Raw statistical data must be considered with appropriate quantitative and qualitative indicators. For example, stating that the number of women in a legislature has doubled is positive, but it does not give the full picture when the actual percentage of women is only 20 per cent, reflecting the relative absence of women from higher decision-making positions. It is essential that there be a rights-based approach. All international treaties and conventions should serve as the basis of such analyses — from the International Bill of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Vienna Declaration and Platform for Action, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Cairo Declaration and Programme of Action and the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is particularly relevant for the elimination of direct and indirect discriminations in national legislation and practices.

Creation of a women's entity at the United Nations

8. While IFUW applauds the adoption of the resolution on the creation of a women's entity by the General Assembly in September 2009 (see General Assembly resolution 63/311, para. 1), this is only the first step. To ensure that such a women's entity is sustainable institutionally, a strong leader must be appointed as Under-Secretary-General, one who is grounded in women's rights and gender equality and who will lead the process of consolidating the four existing entities. It is essential that adequate resources be provided from the regular budget. It is crucial that civil society be a part of the consultation and recruitment process at every level — local, national, regional and global. For a stronger, more coherent delivery on gender equality, the new women's entity at the United Nations must establish a synergetic relationship with the Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. A human rights-based approach is an institutional guarantee to ensure a gender equal perspective and accountability system to trace quantitative and qualitative progress.